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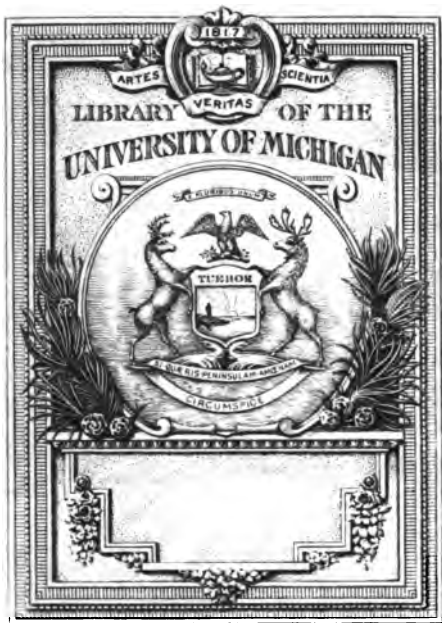
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**MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE**

**OF THE**

***YOUNG ROSCIUS.***

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Merritt, J

of Liverpool

MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE

OF

Wm. Henry West Betty,

KNOWN BY THE NAME OF THE

YOUNG ROSCIUS,

WITH A GENERAL

ESTIMATE OF HIS TALENTS,

AND A

*Critique on his Principal Characters.*

" ut premerer sacra

" Lauroque collataque myrto

" Non sine Diis animosus infans."

hok.

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1804.





TO  
**JAMES CURRIE, M. D. F. R. S.**  
IN TESTIMONY  
OF  
THE HIGHEST RESPECT AND ESTEEM  
FOR HIS  
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CHARACTER,  
AND  
IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF  
MANY INSTANCES OF KINDNESS  
WHICH  
THE AUTHOR HAS RECEIVED FROM HIM,  
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED,  
BY HIS MOST OBDIENT SERVANT,  
**J. MERRITT.**

*Liverpool,*  
24th November, 1804. }

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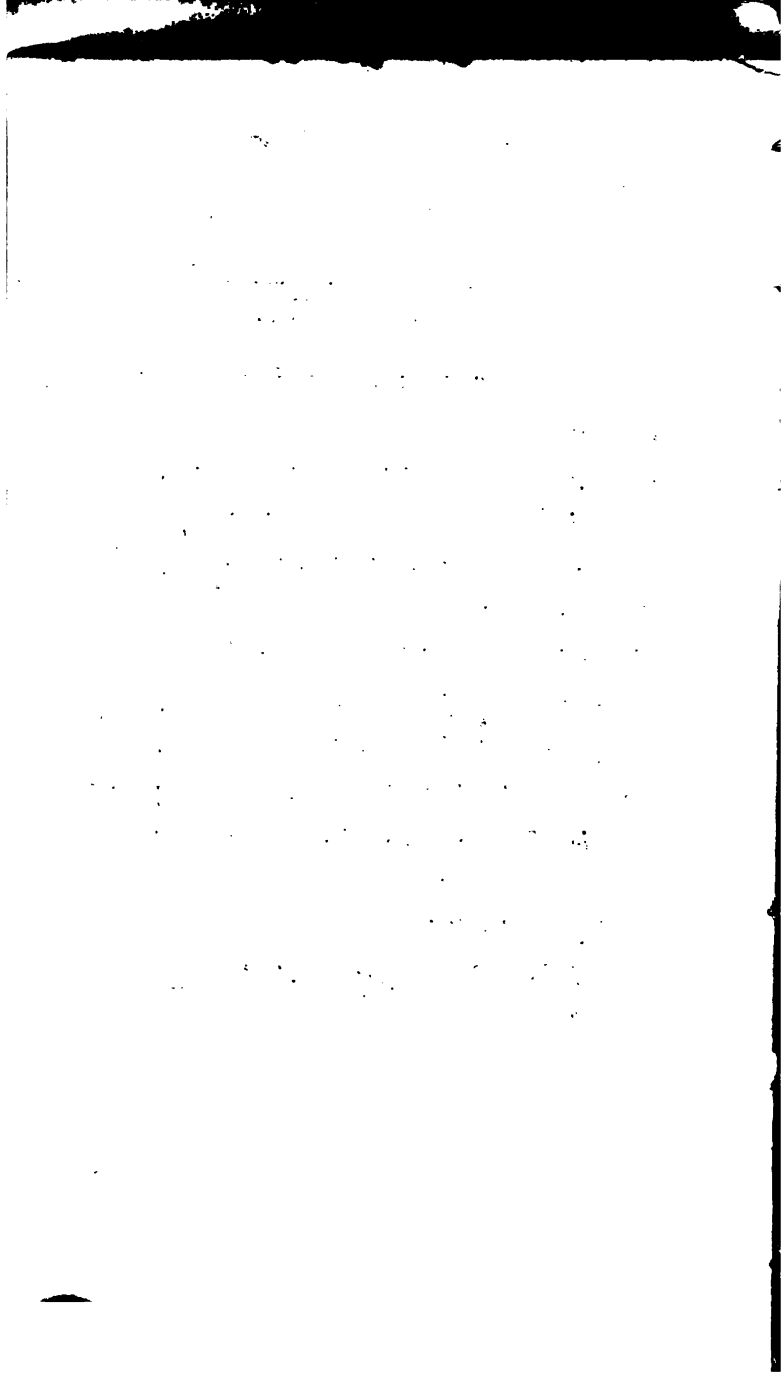
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## ADVERTISEMENT.

*The following Work having been written in great haste, from an eagerness to gratify the increasing curiosity of the Public on this interesting subject, the Author is apprehensive that some errors or inconsistencies, of which he is not aware, may possibly have escaped his attention. His readers, however, may be assured, that the facts recorded in this Volume have been ascertained from the most authentic sources; and that the Criticisms were written from careful and repeated observation.*



English  
Houses  
7.26.43  
47802

## MEMOIRS, &c.



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THERE is no observation more common, as there is no sentiment more natural, than that every man is anxious to know something of the history of a person, whose talents or whose fortune have, in an eminent degree, excited his interest. Of whatever occupies much of our attention, the mind is always desirous of acquiring some decisive and settled notions, on which it may repose itself, after being wearied by the uncertainty of conjectures, and the contradiction of rumours. If this desire is thought justifiable in matters of comparatively small importance, it is certainly

much more so in the case of an object of curiosity, who has sufficient influence to rouse the attention of a whole country ; who may be said to have made a considerable addition to the national stock of intellectual amusement, and who, in the opinion of some individuals, is destined to fix a new epocha, perhaps, to effect an important revolution, in one of the most important arts of civilized life.

In a nation like this, where literary commerce is arrived at such perfection, public curiosity is no sooner awakened, than hundreds are found prepared, from different motives, to administer to its gratification. Whatever is earnestly sought for, is sure to be instantly supplied, and in this mutual eagerness, the authenticity of the information is not very rigidly examined. This has happened in the case of the subject of these

memoirs. A variety of statements and details respecting him, have already found their way into the periodical publications. As many of these are altogether fabulous, and all of them very erroneous, the present short work, as far as respects the narrative, has been compiled from the communication of his nearest friends, in the hope of satisfying the reasonable expectation of the public on so interesting a subject.

Perhaps there is no instance in the history of mankind, of any individual having acquired, from personal merit alone, so high a reputation, at so early a period of life. Nor is the general sentiment in his favour, the mere suffrage of the vulgar, easily obtained by any object or art which powerfully strikes the senses. It is a decision pronounced by those who think with discernment and feel

with delicacy ; a judgment in which fastidious refinement and uncultivated nature are generally concurrent, and almost universal. In many places renowned for their high civilization, his theatrical performances have not only satisfied the taste of his auditors, but what is still more extraordinary, he has seemed even to advance the dignity of the art itself. Numbers of the most respectable inhabitants who had not for many years entered the walls of a theatre, have crowded to see his performances, night after night, with unabated pleasure.

At the same time I am far from affirming, that exaggerated praise has not often been bestowed on the subject of these memoirs. The mind is naturally disposed to assent to the general cry, and public sympathy inspires a strong predilection. Finding more than was expected, we are inclined to grant all



that is demanded. Some, no doubt, have been biaſſed by his tender years, and others by his external graces. I am, however, firmly of opinion, that he has not gained ſo much by thoſe who have praized, where there was nothing to commend, as he has loſt by thoſe who have cenſured, where there was nothing to blame. There is, as has been often obſerved, a large claſs of perſons, whoſe opinions are entirely influenced by their vanity, and who ſuppoſe that critical acumen is chiefly apparent in the detection of faults. With them the *nil admirari* is the diſtinguiſhing mark of ſuperior penetration. To beſtow praiſe, they think a vulgar prerogative; a ſtrong characteristic of the *ſervum pecus*; an occupation to which the moſt illiterate underſtanding is perfectly commenfurate. Such perſons are apt to affect a degree of refinement

which they do not possess, and find fault, not as their feelings, or even their judgment may dictate, but in order to acquire or support a reputation of superior sagacity. Having submitted these preliminary remarks to the consideration of the reader, I shall now enter on the narrative without further delay.

WILLIAM HENRY WEST BETTY, only son of William Henry Betty, was born on the 13th of September, 1791, as appears from the parish register of the church of St. Chad's, in Shrewsbury. Mr Betty, the father, was the son of Dr Betty, a physician of the first eminence at Lisburn, not far from Belfast, in the north of Ireland, at whose death he became possessed of a handsome independent fortune. His wife was Miss Mary Stanton, the daughter of a respectable gentleman in the county of Worcester. She was a young

lady of good education and high accomplishments, and brought him a respectable fortune, part of which it is said, is entailed on the young gentleman who is the subject of these memoirs. It has been frequently said, that Miss Stanton had been formerly either a performer on a public stage, or in the frequent habit of acting in private theatres; neither of which reports have the smallest foundation in truth. The name of Stanton happens to belong to several families of the theatrical profession, in various parts of the kingdom, and this circumstance, from the mere identity of the names, may have led to a supposition that the family of Mr Betty was included in the number.

It is, however, certain, that Miss Stanton always discovered a great predilection for the amusements of the theatre, and she and her sisters, in their

own family, used frequently to divert themselves with reciting plays and other pieces of poetry. An amusement not only innocent, but under certain restrictions extremely laudable. Practised within the bounds of prudence, and with a due regard to the judicious selection of plays, there is no species of entertainment more agreeably instructive, or more calculated to give habits of elegant speaking and easy deportment. The great inconvenience attending the practice, as it relates to females, is, that it has been sometimes found to inspire an ardent passion for the stage, so that what was begun in jest, has often had a very serious conclusion. This is certainly an objection of great weight, and is entitled to mature consideration; yet the custom of acting plays, even in public, is practised by the boys in some of our best schools, with great advan-

tage to the scholars and without producing any material mischief.

Mr Betty, at the time of the birth of his son, lived within a small distance of Shrewsbury, from whence he removed, a few years after, to the neighbourhood of his native place, in the north of Ireland. He occupied a farm, and also carried on some business relating to the linen manufactory, near Ballyhinch, in the county of Down. He remained in this situation, till the rising celebrity of his son rendered it necessary for him to give up his employments, in order to attend the young gentleman in his theatrical excursions.

Mr. Betty, as well as his lady, has been always attached to the entertainments of the theatre, and has been occasionally in habits of intimacy, with some of the most eminent professors of

the dramatic art, both here and in Ireland. Hence it is natural to suppose, that the subject of acting would be frequently introduced in the family, and Master Betty must necessarily have imbibed some notions respecting it, and perhaps some inclination towards it, at a very tender age. The early enthusiasm and precocious excellence of children, in different arts and acquirements, may generally be traced to some causes of this kind. The work of education begins insensibly, and at a very early period in the infant mind; and it is extremely difficult to distinguish a natural propensity, from an acquired habit. Almost all the extraordinary instances which have occurred, of premature abilities, have happened in the art or profession, which has been exercised by the parents.

Mrs. Betty being herself an accom-

plished speaker, and residing in a district where the English language is spoken in its worst state of depravity, thought it necessary to pay particular attention to the education of her son, in that ornamental and necessary acquirement. He was, therefore, exercised at an early period, in the habit of reciting passages from the best authors, and was taught to pronounce the language with propriety. Her conduct, in this respect, was not dictated, in the smallest degree, by any views concerning his future destination in life, but was founded in her knowledge of the importance of elegant and correct speaking, as a branch of education; and she saw that her son could not possibly acquire it, by any other means, in the remote situation where they resided. There is, indeed, the strongest reason to believe, that Mrs. Betty, so far from having designed him, at an early age,

for the theatrical profession, would have listened to any suggestion of the kind, with the utmost indignation. He was her only offspring; descended both by the father and mother's side, from families of some consideration in their respective countries : she loved him with the most passionate fondness, and possessed, in their full force, the usual prejudices against a profession, in itself of the highest respectability, but frequently degraded by the irregular and imprudent conduct of its members. . I mention these particulars, because it has been frequently asserted that Mrs. Betty had, from his earliest infancy, destined her son for the stage, and had brought him to the perfection, which is now the theme of such general astonishment, by the most careful tuition, continued through his whole life with incessant assiduity. This notion has been suggested by some who are unwilling to



attribute any extraordinary effects to the mere force of natural genius,\* and it has been eagerly propagated by others who seem anxious to represent him, as the mere creature of discipline, destitute alike of feeling and discernment.

In the summer of 1802, the play of Pizarro was brought out by the Belfast manager with much splendour, and Mrs Siddons was the Elvira. As Mr Betty and his son happened to be in the town, they were induced to go to the theatre, being the first time that Master Betty had ever seen a play. From this moment his fate was decided. When he came home he told his father with a look of such enthusiasm, and a voice so pathetic, that those who heard him will

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\* Yet Horace says,

Ingenium miserâ fortunatius arte

Credit Democritus.

*De Arte Poetica.*

never forget the expression, *that he should certainly die, if he must not be a player*. The wonderful acting of Mrs. Siddons, in *Elvira*, not easily to be forgotten by the most phlegmatic, had left an impression on his glowing mind, which nothing could ever erase. It was fortunate for himself, that his first, and therefore most durable impressions, were stamped by such a model. He talked of nothing but *Elvira*; he spouted the speeches of *Elvira*, and his passion for the stage became every hour more vehement and uncontrollable. He returned with his father to Ballynahinch, but not to his usual occupations. The Siddonian accents still rang in his ear; and her majestic march and awful brow still filled his fancy. Every thing was neglected for his favourite object; and every thing not connected with it, became tiresome and insipid. His propensity grew visibly more rooted by

time; his importunities were irresistible, and his parents at length finding all opposition unavailing, were compelled to think seriously of the practicability of indulging him.

It may be remarked, as a strong proof of the correctness of his natural taste, that though Rolla is the hero of the piece, and a part which is eminently calculated to strike the romantic mind of youth, yet it made on his, but a slight impression. Elvira alone was the heroine of his imagination, for he saw the character only through the medium of the actress. He was instantly able to separate the genuine ore from the surrounding dross, and saw at once what was to be imitated; and what to be avoided. A part of very inferior interest became predominant in his mind,

because it was in the hands of a great actress.

In pursuance of the resolution he had taken, Mr. Betty returned with his son to Belfast, in order to consult Mr. Atkins, and to ask his opinion of the boy's qualifications. Mr. Atkins is the manager of the Belfast theatre, and a man of friendly dispositions and liberal character. In his presence, Master Betty repeated some passages from the part of Elvira, with the wild and unskilful vigour of untutored genius. The manager was a good deal struck with what he had heard, but wished to have the opinion of Mr. Hough, his prompter, for whose judgment he had a considerable deference. That gentleman was accordingly sent for, and immediately discerned in the boy's recitation and action, great capabilities for a first rate actor. He gave him a few instructions,

and at the same time pointed out to him the part of Rolla, as a much fitter object of his study, than that of Elvira, to which he had been directed by his feelings, on seeing the performance of Mrs. Siddons. The young gentleman felt the full value of the knowledge he had received, and in the ardour of his gratitude, told Mr. Hough, he was his *guardian angel*. The father and son now returned once more to Ballynahinch, and Master Betty happening to find the tragedy of Zara in the house, began to study the part of Osman, in addition to that of Rolla and some others. Some time afterwards, Mr. Hough accepted a pressing invitation which he had received from Mr. Betty, to pass a short time at his house in the country, with a view of observing the boy more narrowly, and in order to give him more detailed instructions.

Mr. Hough soon found that his pupil possessed a docility even greater than his genius, for, whatever he was directed to do, he could instantly execute, and was sure never to forget. He found that his feelings could take the impression of every passion and sentiment, and express them in their appropriate language. Whatever was properly presented to his mind, he could immediately lay hold of, and seemed to seize by a sort of intuitive sagacity, the spirit of every sentence, and the prominent beauties of every remarkable passage.

The happy moment at length arrived, which was to realize our hero's hopes and wishes. Mr. Atkins, induced by the reports he had received, and solicitous to bring forward some extraordinary novelty, on account of the

extreme depression of the times,\* offered him an engagement to play at Belfast, for four nights. Accordingly about the middle of August, in the year 1803, he announced the tragedy of Zara, the part of Osman to be undertaken by *a young gentleman only eleven years of age*. The singularity of the exhibition, drew together a great croud of people, who were equally astonished and enraptured, at the performance of the young actor. A gentleman of the profession, who was present on the occasion, himself a good tragedian, and a competent judge of the art, assured me that his performance, even at that time, was striking and correct beyond all belief. He discovered no mark of embarrassment on his first appearance, and went through the part without any

\* The much lamented insurrection in Dublin, which caused the death of Lord Kilwarden, had recently taken place, and had spread a great alarm over all parts of the country.

confusion or mistake. The applauses were, of course, tumultuous and incessant. The actors of the regular company were confounded to see themselves so completely schooled by a mere infant, and even those who had formed the most sanguine expectations concerning him, were amazed at his success.

The next day he was the common topic of conversation in all parts of the town. Persons of sober judgment, who had not seen him, treated the matter, as they have done every where else, with derision and incredulity. They supposed his performance to be like that of other children they had seen: that he had been taught a few attitudes and stage tricks, and had learned to look the audience in the face and speak boldly. When assured that he had excited the deepest sympathy in the spectators, and that many parts of his acting, even in



a man, would have been thought admirable, they looked on all that was said as idle exaggeration. They determined however to attend his next performance, and to judge for themselves.

The following day he was announced for the interesting part of young Norval, in the tragedy of Douglas. His performance of this part, it was justly thought, would afford a fair test of his real capability, as the character, without requiring any violent stretch of the imagination, might, in some degree, be assimilated to his years and figure. The deriding, as well as the "admiring throng," now made a point of attending the theatre; and the next day the whole town of Belfast, with scarcely any exceptions, were of one sentiment concerning him. He not only confirmed the favourable impression of his first performance, but he displayed new

excellencies of a very high order, and such as are supposed to be of the most difficult attainment. The jealousy, rage and despair of Osman, an usual gradation of passions, were more easy to represent than the chastened spirit and modest heroism of the gallant Douglas. It was thought impossible that a boy could be brought to comprehend or to pourtray these nice effects of contending principles. But every obstacle was surmounted. He played the part with such unaffected yet energetic simplicity, that the most incredulous were satisfied, and his fame, among the inhabitants of Belfast, was firmly established. He next played Rolla with equal success, and afterwards Romeo, which concluded his engagement.

In the mean time, Mr Jones, the manager of the Dublin Theatre, had heard of this dramatic prodigy; and

soon after his last performance at Belfast, offered him an engagement on very advantageous terms. After some negotiation, the particulars of an agreement were settled, by which he was to play nine nights at the theatre royal, Crow-street. As the young gentleman's talents and importance were now become manifest, Mr Betty very prudently resolved to contribute every means in his power to bring forward and mature so rare a genius. With this view he solicited Mr Hough to attend his son in his excursion to Dublin, as well as in all his future engagements; both for the purpose of continuing his instructions, and for taking the superintendence of his theatrical interests and conduct. Mr Hough having conceived a strong attachment to the boy, as well as a sanguine hope of his future eminence, accepted the proposal, and immediately resigned his situation in the Belfast

theatre. From that time to the present he has directed his whole time and attention to his celebrated pupil, and their strong attachment to each other is a proof that the appointment was mutually agreeable. On the nature of Mr Hough's abilities, as an instructor, the public are enabled to decide: he is certainly entitled to great credit, for the care and judgment with which he has fulfilled his trust.

The people of Dublin were prepared to receive the young Roscius with the most liberal kindness, for the voice of fame had preceded his arrival. But he had here to encounter a very different ordeal, from that which he had recently undergone at Belfast. The city of Dublin, like that of Edinburgh, is the capital of an enlightened nation; the seat of an university; and of course the natural confluence of the learned and

polite, from all parts of the kingdom. Each of these cities abounds with young men of independent spirit; of high education and talents; who exercise with rigour the prerogatives of these qualifications, and are determined to admit no spurious claims to excellence in any art or science. These *arbitri elegantiarum* permit no one to coquette with the muses, who cannot make out some title to their favours, and defend their abodes from violation, with all the ardour of chivalry. The candidate for theatrical honours, or indeed any other honours, must therefore expect to have his pretensions weighed minutely in the balance of criticism; and if they should be found wanting, he must prepare to submit to the severest castigation. Any quarter given to ignorance or imbecility, would not fail to bring down, on the critics

themselves, the severest reprehension.\* Our hero has now passed through both these dread tribunals, and has come out, purified like gold from the furnace. He has not, indeed, escaped wholly untouched, but their investigation has established his fame on so firm a basis,† that he may now bid defiance to the attacks of inferior critics.

His first appearance at Dublin was on Monday, the 28th November, 1803, in his favourite part of young Norval. He was announced as the *young Gentleman who had acquired the appellation of the INFANT ROSCIUS*, being only 12 years old. The house was crowded with company of the first rank; and such was his reception in the character,

\* *Judex damnatur si nocens absolvitur.* PUB. SYR.

† *Quod non imber edax, non aquilo impotens  
Possit diruere, aut innumerabilis  
Annorum series, et fuga temporum.* HOR.

that the play was repeated on his second night of performing, with increased attraction. The third night he played Frederick, in the comedy of Lover's Vows, in which he was, if possible, still more successful than before. His representation of that character is, indeed, generally admitted to be one of the most perfect performances of the modern stage. He played the whole nine nights of his engagement to the most brilliant audiences, and with a great increase of reputation to himself and of profit to the managers.

While he remained at Dublin, Mr Jones was so sensible of his eminent talents and of his importance, as an acquisition to the theatre, that he became very solicitous to secure to himself so valuable a treasure. He offered, accordingly, to engage him by

articles for a term of years, at a liberal and increasing salary, but Mr Betty very judiciously thought proper to decline the proposal.

Among the different lampoons which appeared against the young Roscius, during his Dublin engagement, there was only one which was entitled to any kind of notice. This was contained in a series of letters, in Hudibrastic verse, relating to the performers of the theatre, and addressed to the manager. It is something on the plan of Anthony Pasquin's *Thespiad*, and though a careless and unfinished performance, is written with great spirit and force of satire. The ladies and gentlemen of the theatre are treated with very little ceremony, and among the rest, Master Betty does not escape some severe animadversions. The principal charges brought against him,



however, relate to his age and size, but the author's censure is chiefly directed against the manager, for degrading the dignity of the stage, by introducing a child in the principal characters of the drama. The young gentleman's parents are treated with no less asperity, for suffering such a premature exhibition. This charge has frequently been made, and it would certainly be just, if his claims to public attention rested on the mere forwardness of his capacity, and on his uncommon merits as a child of twelve years old. But the pretensions of the young Roscius require no such allowances, and demand to be examined by another standard. His abilities will stand by their own intrinsic weight, independent of the considerations and palliatives which his age may suggest.

The engagement with Mr. Jones

being completed, his friends were induced to accept an offer of playing six nights at Cork, from Mr. Peros, the manager of a respectable company of comedians in the south of Ireland. He opened with Hamlet, on the 31st December, and afterwards played Romeo, Douglas, and some other characters. The house was so completely filled every night, that a great number of the inhabitants of Cork and its neighbourhood, could not possibly get an opportunity of seeing his performance. An agreement was therefore made with Mr. Peros, to extend the engagement for three nights longer. That his power of attraction was beyond any thing ever witnessed in that city, will appear from the following circumstance. Besides Mr. Peros' theatre in Cork, which was formerly occupied by Mr. Philip Astley, and adapted for his performances, there is another belonging to the Dublin

manager. In this the Dublin company play regularly several months in the year, and it is of course accounted the principal theatre. The nightly receipts at this house frequently do not exceed ten pounds, yet it is an assured fact, that Mr. Peros, during the performance of the young Roscius, received upwards of one hundred pounds every night.

By this time the fame of his extraordinary success had reached as far as Scotland, and he now received a proposal from Mr. Jackson, the Edinburgh manager, to play a few nights in that city. The offer was accepted; but as Mr. Jackson's season was then far advanced, it was agreed that he should first perform at Glasgow, the ensuing spring, and afterwards fulfil his engagement at Edinburgh. This interval enabled him, after completing his nine nights at Cork, to accompany Mr.

Peros' company to Waterford, where he performed four nights, with as much encouragement from the inhabitants, and as much advantage to himself, as could reasonably be desired.

His friends now thought it advisable to begin their journey to the north, as the spring was approaching, and it was desirable to be in a convenient situation for the passage to Scotland. This long journey, almost from one extremity of Ireland to the other, in the depth of winter, was of course extremely tedious and fatiguing. However, it was happily completed without any accident, and he once more joined his old friend Mr Atkins, at Londonderry, where it had been agreed that he should play six nights, as the Glasgow theatre was not to open for some time. Having completed this engagement with the same good fortune which had hitherto attended

him, they set forward for the place of embarkation to Port Patrick. Most unfortunately, in their way to the coast, Mrs Betty was seized with a very severe and dangerous illness, which obliged them to stop at an obscure village on the road. Here they were detained for more than five weeks, under the most disagreeable circumstances; the weather being very inclement, and scarcely any medical assistance to be procured. At the end of that time she recovered sufficient strength to go forward, and at length, after many difficulties, and a most stormy passage across the channel, they arrived in safety at Glasgow.

The scene was now entirely changed. They had entered into a new kingdom, where the habits and manners of the people differed considerably from those of the country they had left, and it was

not known but that their taste for dramatic excellence might be equally different. Our hero's friends, who knew well the force of national passions and prejudices, were not entirely without apprehensions for the consequences of this change. Mr Jackson, they knew, had been blamed, as well as ridiculed, for bringing him over ; and the reports from Ireland, respecting his admirable acting, had been treated in this neighbourhood as chimerical and extravagant. His supposed excellencies had been attributed to that national partiality, to that ardent imagination, and that propensity to exaggeration, for which the Irish have long been celebrated. Mr Jackson, however, who knew that the genuine feelings of human nature are universally the same, encouraged them to hope, and assured them that all would be well.

The first appearance of the young Roscius in Great Britain, was accordingly fixed for Wednesday the 21st May, 1804, in the character of Douglas, the part with which he usually opens. His reception was equal to the manager's most sanguine expectations, and proved that the language of nature and passion are every where alike understood, and equally relished. Mr Jackson, in writing on this subject, declares "that he received the greatest bursts of applause that he had ever witnessed to have been given by any audience." He played the whole fourteen nights of his engagement, to overflowing houses, and received the same approbation in every character he attempted.

A few days after his first appearance at Glasgow, a very severe philippic against his performance of Douglas, was published by an anonymous critic. I

have not seen a copy of this pamphlet, but I am told it is written with very unjustifiable asperity, and that the satire is, in almost every respect, unmerited and illiberal. At all events, it does not appear to have produced its intended effect on those to whom it was addressed. The author was discovered, and the expression of public indignation against him, became so violent, that, as I am informed, he thought it advisable for some time to quit the city.

From Glasgow Mr Jackson conducted the young Roscius to Edinburgh, where he performed the same number of nights with such a similarity of success, that to describe it, would be merely a tiresome repetition of the same modes of expression. The audience of this metropolis is esteemed by many the most refined in the three kingdoms, and criticism was here drained to the very



dregs, in analysing his performances, and detecting his weaknesses. The accounts which have been sent from Edinburgh, have been, at least some of them, written with vigour and acuteness, but with a visible eagerness to expose defects, and a singular inaptitude in the discovery of beauties. He is even charged with some gross errors and excesses, of which no traces are to be found in his acting; such as affectation, bombast and extravagance. This is something worse than illiberal. He has no right to expect indulgence at the expense of sincerity, but surely his helpless age and arduous efforts, entitle him to all the consideration and kindness not incompatible with truth.

While he remained in Scotland, offers of engagements from the principal theatrical managers in this country,

poured in upon him from all quarters. He had already passed through two parts of the empire with an uninterrupted career of success, and the third now only remained for his scene of action. Till his performance at Edinburgh, he had been very little heard of in England, but his fame was now extending itself rapidly in every direction; and the continual rumours of his extraordinary talents began to excite attention even in London. Mr. M'Cready, the manager of the Birmingham theatre, was the first who brought him before the English public. He was the earliest in his application, for this enviable and profitable distinction, and every one will be pleased to hear that his spirit and exertion have been most liberally requited. The young Roscius played at Birmingham fourteen nights; and the theatrical annals of that town, furnish nothing equal to the astonishing commotion which

his performances excited. The public inns were completely occupied with persons who came to see him, from every part of the surrounding country; and even the stage coaches, from places at a distance, were filled with passengers on the same errand. The case was exactly the same at Sheffield, where he afterwards performed fourteen nights under the same manager. The town was so crowded with company, that it was with great difficulty a bed could be procured either in public or private houses.

After leaving Sheffield, he arrived, about the beginning of October, at Liverpool. All his former successes at other places, however brilliant and unprecedented, were here completely eclipsed. The inhabitants of this town are particularly attached to dramatic

amusements, and the ordinary receipts of the theatre greatly exceed those of any other in the kingdom, London, and perhaps Dublin, only excepted. This is apparent from the rent paid by the managers, Messrs. Lewis and Knight, to the proprietors, which is fifteen hundred pounds per annum. The house is also considerably more spacious than any other in the empire, except those before mentioned; yet the difficulty of admittance was such, during the performance of the young Roscius, that a few minutes after the door was opened, not a place was to be obtained in any part of the house. When the box-office opened in a morning, the pressure to procure places was so excessive, that many gentlemen had their clothes torn in pieces; their hats and shoes carried away in the crowd, and themselves, sometimes, severely bruised, and almost suffocated in the attempt. There is

reason to believe, that if the theatre had been twice as large, it would have been equally thronged. The terms of his engagement were so liberal, that he received from the managers, for his share of the profits of fifteen nights, the enormous sum of fifteen hundred and twenty pounds; as appears from Mr. Betty's receipt in Mr. Knight's possession. Perhaps it would be difficult to find an example of so large a sum having ever before been paid to any individual for personal exertion alone, in the same space of time.

From Liverpool he went to Chester, where he played seven nights; and his performances, as usual, were attended by all the gentry of the neighbourhood, for a circuit of many miles. He left that city on the 9th November, in order to perform a few nights at Manchester,

which is his last engagement in the country, previous to his appearance on the boards of the metropolis. The terms of his engagement in London are, it is said, more advantageous than were ever before given to any performer in the annals of the theatre. He is first to play six nights at Covent Garden, then twelve at Drury-Lane, and afterwards eighteen at Covent-Garden, at the exorbitant salary of fifty guineas a night, and the clear receipts of the house for every twelve nights performance. This rapid accumulation of wealth, at so early a period of life, is a circumstance unexampled in the biography of any age or nation.

During his performance at Liverpool, he had the honour to enjoy the particular notice and protection of Prince William Frederick of Gloucester, who now resides in that neighbourhood

as commander in chief of the north western district. His Royal Highness, with the condescension and kindness which distinguish his character, not only testified the highest gratification at his performances, but was pleased to interest himself very strongly in his future welfare. He sent for Mr Betty and his son to St. Domingo,\* and expressed to the former, his admiration of the young gentleman's uncommon talents, and his anxious wish that every means might be employed to bring such rare abilities to their full maturity. He recommended also, in the most open and friendly manner, that the produce of his exertions, or a considerable part of it, should be placed for his use in the hands of trustees. The fund so formed, he said, would furnish the means of completing his education on a liberal and ex-

\* A beautiful villa about two miles from Liverpool, the present residence of his Royal Highness.

tensive plan, adapted to the profession he had chosen, and of which he was likely to become so conspicuous an ornament. For that purpose he thought it would be advisable to engage, at a suitable salary, a man of learning and character, who was qualified to accomplish such a scheme of instruction, and would devote his whole attention to the care of his pupil.

No advice could be more judicious than this, and there is every reason to believe, that as far as circumstances may permit, it is intended to be adopted. With respect to pecuniary matters, it is but justice to say, that Mr Betty is perfectly sensible of the sort of responsibility which attaches to his situation. He is fully aware that the whole community have their eyes upon him, and that he is considered as in some degree, a guardian of the public purse. Such a right of



cognizance the public will naturally assume, in a case of such general and peculiar interest.

But the management of his son's education, is a matter of far greater moment than the care of his property. The loss of fortune may be easily repaired, but what can atone for the loss of opportunities which can never be recalled? If the spring of life be suffered to elapse, and the proper culture is neglected, what future harvest of wealth or fame can repair the injury? In such a case, he would have cause to regret the bounties which nature had bestowed, and the successes of his youth would constitute the misfortunes of his declining age.

It has often been regretted by those who think that the theatre ought to be restored to its ancient and natural dig-

nity, that society furnishes no establishments for a regular scheme of theatrical education. The profession is undoubtedly liberal, in the most extensive construction of the word. It requires a greater assemblage of perfections, corporeal and mental, than perhaps any other. Yet while law, physic and divinity, as well as other arts and sciences, have their schools, their colleges, and professors, this alone is destitute of any institution, which may facilitate its difficult and laborious attainment. The actor is left to explore his way in the dark, exposed to all the errors of his own unformed taste, and to the dangerous contagion of bad examples.

These complaints are assuredly just, but in the present state of things they are irremediable. If such institutions actually existed, they would be of very little use. The wretched remuneration

received by the bulk of the profession, and the rank it holds in public estimation, must prevent any gentleman of birth and education from embracing it as a means of subsistence. It is commonly the resource of necessity or of indolence, sometimes of visionary weakness, or of an ill placed enthusiasm for the art. In all these cases, there is neither the will nor the power to go through a course of preparatory study. The slow advancement of the art amongst its inferior professors, is not, therefore, any matter of just surprise or of reasonable complaint. The state of perfection which they have actually reached, moderate as it may appear, is the real wonder. These observations will be assented to by any one who has remarked, that when a company of private gentlemen, even of talents and education, undertake to act a play, their performance will commonly be found inferior to that

of the meanest strollers in a provincial market town.

It is happy for the subject of these memoirs, that he is secured by situation and fortune from these usual disadvantages of the profession. He is in possession of all the means and opportunities for the complete developement of his genius ; and that he possesses the requisite dispositions, no one can doubt, who reflects on the progress he has already made. But though external advantages are all in his favour, he is not without difficulties of another kind. His path appears covered with roses, but it is equally fruitful of thorns. All the dangers peculiarly to be dreaded at his time of life, when the feelings are vivid and the understanding is weak, constantly surround him. He is assailed by public and private flattery, administered in every shape and form ; exposed to

the plaudits of admiring crowds ; to the careffes of the great ; the notice of the wife and learned, and the adulation of his brother actors. Against fuch a hoft of temptations, even the wifdom and firmnefs of manhood are generally found infufficient. In his cafe the chance of refiftance is peculiarly feeble. He encounters nothing, when retired into the bofom of his family, which can tend to fteel him againft the dangers from without. He has been brought up with the ufual tendernefs of parents to an only child ; always unufed to oppofition or harfhnefs, and of courfe not lefs fo fince his fucceffes have rendered him an object of importance, and his fatigues and exertions have feemed to juftify indulgence. But I have no wifh even to infinuate any blame on fuch a fubject as this. The venial errors of maternal

fondness are not to be touched with a rude hand.\*

It must however be admitted by those who know him, that he has been less influenced by these concurrent sources of corruption than could possibly have been conceived. He is never seen to discover any consciousness of his superior talents, or any elation at the greatest tumults of applause. He never displays any sense of his own importance, or ever adverts to it in conversation, directly or indirectly. He appears even to be impatient of public notice when not on the stage, and to be oppressed by the invitations and marks of attention which he is constantly receiving. Yet it would be too much to affirm that he has wholly escap-

\* La mere qui gâte son enfant, veut qu'il soit heureux, qu'il le soit dès à présent ; en cela elle a raison : quand elle se trompe sur les moyens il faut l'éclairer.

ed from the complicated dangers which beset him. But his faults are those of a spoiled child, not of a vain and arrogant youth. He is in a high degree good-natured, affectionate and friendly, but at the same time capricious, easily offended, and impatient of remonstrance. The instruction to which he is likely to listen, must be that of example rather than of precept. It must be insinuated and not enforced.

It is a little remarkable, that though on the stage his deportment and address are so completely those of a man, yet in private life he is more than commonly childish. All his amusements and sports are infantine, even beyond his years. But though among his equals in age, he is sportive and boyish; his usual manner is serious and pensive. Sometimes he appears restrained and

timid ; at others, he seems indifferent to every thing around him. But his fondness for play, and for every thing else, instantly give way, when his favourite pursuit is in the question. His attachment to his art is paramount to every other passion, and his character is another illustration of the remark, that nature seldom inspires a strong ambition for any object, without furnishing at the same time, the abilities to attain it.

I am sorry to close this account with observing, that his health seems to have sustained some injury from his strenuous exertions, during the last few months. The anxiety of managers, and the curiosity of the public, have visibly forced him to efforts beyond his strength. There is, however, reason to hope, that when he arrives in London, he will be suffered to play no oftener



than his constitution will easily bear, and that a proper plan of life, both in respect to his health and education, will then be adopted. Every thing is to be expected from such men as Mr. Harris and Mr. Sheridan, and to the effects of their advice and assistance, the public have a right to look forward with the greatest confidence.

IT is not without some hesitation and much diffidence, that I venture on the attempt of forming a general estimate of the natural endowments and acquired talents of this extraordinary youth. It is a subject on which a great diversity of opinions has necessarily been formed ; and they have been formed, for the most part, with that impatience of suspense and of deliberation, which is always felt, when the matter under consideration, is of popular interest. The merits of the young Roscius is a point on which, though very few have reflected, every one has decided. Theatrical criticism may be thought by some, a branch of knowledge requiring extensive enquiry and natural sagacity, but it is an art to which every auditor thinks himself com-

petent, and a prerogative which he never fails to exercise with unhesitating freedom. In writing on such a subject, therefore, it is difficult to avoid, and perhaps difficult not to deserve, the charge of presumption, of ignorance, or of partiality; and in appealing to such a variety of judges, nothing but very limited approbation can reasonably be expected.

The young Roscius has no natural deficiencies, but such as necessarily arise from his very early age, and the circumstances in which he is placed. A person endowed with such an affluence of natural gifts for the theatric art is, indeed, a phænomenon of such rare emergence, that several centuries may elapse without producing such another.

His face is not exactly beautiful, but is as much so as can be wished, for all

the purposes of the drama, and for the complete gratification of the eye. In a state of quiescence, it is not marked by any particular expression; but when his features are lighted up by internal emotion, they exhibit in turn, every movement of the soul, with all the vivacity of genuine passion. His eye is not naturally very animated, but partakes something of the general languor of his countenance. In his person there is no defect of any consequence, but such as will be removed by the progress of time. He possesses in a degree, almost unparalleled, that ease and gracefulness of action and deportment, which is one of the most difficult accomplishments of the art, and which, in others, it is often the labour of a life to acquire. Not only every attitude, but every transition from one attitude to another, as well as every line described by the movements of his body or limbs, are

such specimens of elegance and beauty, as leave nothing to be wished for, by the most refined imagination. And this unrivalled grace and propriety, appear in every change of situation, and in every vicissitude of passion.

In respect to voice, which is a capital requisite, and that on which there exists the greatest diversity of opinion, I am ready to admit that the same unqualified praise cannot be bestowed. On his first appearance at Belfast, I am told, that it possessed a tone of such clearness, strength and silvery sweetness, that the audience and actors were equally struck with it, and unanimously thought it his predominant excellence. At present it has contracted a small degree of huskiness or hoarseness, which, however, is not at all disagreeable to the ear, but excites the idea of his labouring under a slight cold. This has arisen

partly from the frequency and exertion of his performances, which, to a boy of his age, must certainly be distressing, and partly, perhaps, from his being about that time of life, when the voice is breaking or changing its tone. It occasions him some inconveniences; for at times, when he is speaking low, it renders him scarcely audible, and when he is speaking very quick, he becomes a little inarticulate. It is, however, a defect, to which the audience becomes less sensible, as he proceeds; and when he rises into emotion, it is scarcely perceptible. A little relaxation from labour would, perhaps, remove it at present, or it will probably vanish of itself, as he approaches to manhood. There is another deficiency in his voice, arising also, from his extreme youth; which is, that comprising but a very small number of notes, or inflections of sound, it is not capable of sufficient variety.

At his time of life, or a little later, the voice usually breaks, or divides itself into two parts, an upper and a lower, which affords to an adult, great advantages over a boy, by enabling him to diversify his modes and tone of speaking in a very superior degree. It is from this disadvantage, that in the declamation or recitation of the young Roscius, a sort of monotony is sometimes perceptible, which in long speeches becomes fatiguing to the ear. In every other respect his voice is all that could be wished; powerful, deep, and expressive, perhaps, beyond any other on the English stage: so piercing and articulate, as to be heard distinctly in the most remote part of the house; and yet so soft and flexible, as to be capable of expressing the tender passions with the most affecting pathos.

Such are the nature of his external

travagance. We do not see him impassioned, where he ought to be calm, or frigid, where he ought to be energetic.\* We see no vain attempts to give importance to a passage, in itself insignificant, or to elicit the applauses of the audience by unseasonable violence. No unnatural distortion of body, or of countenance, to catch the vulgar eye. "Even in the very whirlwind of his passion, there is a temperance which gives it smoothness."

¶ Nor is the felicity of his judgment apparent only in rejecting deformities; it is equally successful in soliciting beauties. He exhibits, with surprising accuracy, the light and shade of every part; and seems to know exactly what must be rendered prominent in the picture, and what must be thrown into the back

\* *Singula quæque locum teneant sortita decenter.* HON.



ground. Under all its different influences, and in all its varieties of situation, he still preserves the integrity of the character. As the story is gradually evolved, the abilities of the actor appear to unfold likewise. His powers seem to rise with the progress of the action; and the passions which bring forward the catastrophe, as they alternately sway him, are exhibited in their simple or combined operations, with the force and effect of genuine nature.\*

Even in the most sober parts of the character, where the poet is merely displaying his power of fancy, or his learning and philosophy, it is wonderful with what happy emphasis he will sometimes even improve the beauties of

G 2

\* *et in medias res**Non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit.*

Hos.

his author. He will often deliver a passage abounding with logical subtilty and acute remark, with all the discrimination of the maturest judgment, and with fewer mistakes than many actors of long experience and habitual reflection.

But correctness and consistency, though on reflection they appear the prominent excellencies of his acting, are, by no means, those which, in the first instance, make the strongest impression. His power over the heart is the means by which his talents are first recognized. The testimony of the feelings precedes the approbation of the judgment. He no sooner begins to exhibit passion in any of its vigorous forms, than he is sure to catch the sympathy of the audience, and to carry it with him as he rises in emotion. In expressing the tender affections, such

as love, compassion or grief, it seems to be generally admitted, that, with the exception, perhaps, of Kemble and Siddons, he has no rival on the English stage. His accents, and looks, and attitudes, on such occasions, are so irresistibly pathetic, that no heart can withstand their persuasion; and callous indeed must be the feelings which they cannot reach. His beautiful features and graceful figure increase the interest, and aid the effect of his softened tone, his pleading eye and supplicating posture. He seems to be endowed by nature with strong sensibility, and to feel himself what he so forcibly inspires.\* His diminutive size and extreme youth are here scarcely perceptible; sometimes, indeed, they render his tenderness more

G 3

\* Si vis me flere, dolendum est

Primum ipsi tibi.

HOR.

captivating and interesting. This is not the case in depicting the more fierce and dignified passions, such as anger, disdain, pride, or contempt. In these, a manly figure, a commanding voice, and a strongly marked countenance, are great auxiliaries to the skill of the performer. Yet, even here, it is admirable with what address he often surmounts the disadvantages of childhood, and how completely the "beardless boy" is lost in the accomplished actor. He treads the stage with such majesty and grace, exhibits so much dignity in his looks and attitudes, and such force in his language, that the illusion, in spite of every obstacle, is absolutely perfect. With equal effect he portrays the different gradations of fear, terror and horror. His features, on such occasions, assume a certain wild and savage aspect; his voice seems to become more than usually sonorous and solemn; and every

part of his speech and gesture bears the impression of the gloomy and the awful.

In addition to this extensive catalogue of accomplishments, it may be added, that he is always attentive to the action, and to the scope and tendency of the scene in which he is actually engaged. Not merely attentive, as is too often the case, to his own part of the dialogue, but intent on assimilating and connecting the whole. He is so completely master of what is technically called the business of the stage, as to astonish every one, who is aware of the difficulty of confining the attention of boys to minute and uninteresting exactness. Such patient endurance is an undoubted proof that he is seized with that enthusiasm for his art, which is the sure concomitant of great genius.

Such are the predominant excellencies of this extraordinary actor ; and many others might be added of lesser importance, but they will be mentioned with more propriety in the examination of his particular characters. The account which has already been given, will, it is to be feared, appear sufficiently exaggerated. Yet the reader may be assured, that it is written on the most deliberate reflection ; with the utmost possible care to avoid partiality, and at a time when the glow of admiration which his acting never fails to excite, had completely cooled. What has been said, however, is to be understood as applying to the general character of his acting, and not by any means to every particular instance. It is not meant to be asserted, that he is entirely free from faults. It is my earnest wish to exhibit both the lights and the shades of the picture, with equal faithfulness, in order

to afford the reader some assistance in appreciating at their real value, his astonishing aggregate of talents.

Some natural deficiencies in his requisites for the stage, inevitable at his time of life, have already been mentioned in their proper place, and I shall now endeavour to point out his principal defects of execution. They may be reduced chiefly to two heads. An inability sometimes to reach or to distinguish the design or sense of his author, and occasional lapses of attention, with respect to the purport of what he is repeating.

Many of the parts which he performs, are necessarily too much for his strength, and the frequency of his performance is still more so. Boys, at his age, require early hours and regular living, both of which are incompatible

with the profession of an actor. Hence it inevitably happens that he is liable to become fatigued in the course of a long and arduous part ; and a feebleness of execution is occasionally manifest. The passages which the author intended to be peculiarly effective, are sometimes lost and mingled in the general monotony of the recitation. This rarely happens, but in very long speeches of narrative or declamation. On some occasions, his youthful vivacity prevails over his conception of the part, and his speech and motions are too rapid and volatile. A boy at his age cannot always be able to comprehend the entire design of his author, or take a full view of the character he is representing in all its bearings. He is, therefore, liable to lose sight for a moment of its general tenor, when particular occasions seem to counteract it. Some times, though very seldom, he delivers a passage with an



energy disproportionate to its sense, and sometimes also, but still seldomer, he mistakes the emphasis or cadence of an expression, so as to vary or pervert the meaning.

Some of these faults, as I have just observed, visibly arise from inattention at the moment, or from forgetfulness of his instructions, for to suppose that he performs all the wonders of his art entirely without instruction, would be nothing less than to admit the existence of a real prodigy.

Some other minute imperfections might be pointed out, but I shall only mention one more at present, as opportunities will be afforded of being more particular in the criticisms on his individual characters. He has an unfortunate habit, in common with most of his contemporaries, of addressing his solilo-

quies chiefly to the audience, instead of delivering them as the solitary musings of a mind communing with itself. An error so palpable, and so destructive of dramatic interest, must before this time have been reformed, if it had not been connived at or countenanced by those whose province it is to advise him.

### *The Character of Hamlet.*

I Begin with the part of Hamlet, not because it is that in which he is generally thought to exhibit peculiar excellence, but because I consider it as the test by which his merits and defects, whatever they are, may most properly be examined. There is no character in Shakespear more elaborately written, or which displays more variously the genius of the author; and perhaps there is none which requires a greater force and versatility of talent in the actor. In the progress of the play, it develops in succession a great variety of features, all strongly interesting, and brings into action some of the most powerful propensities of human nature, variously

combined, opposed and modified. The intellectual, as well as the moral character of Hamlet, is likewise constantly fluctuating. He is in turn a logician, a critic, and a philosopher. For these reasons, the part is well adapted to exemplify almost all the remarks that can be made on the minutiae of acting; and in placing it foremost, I hope to prevent the necessity of much needless repetition, which must have been otherwise inevitable.

It is not, however, as I have observed above, the part in which our hero has made the strongest impression; yet considering the arduous nature of the task; the difficulties he has to overcome, and how much he actually achieves, it may be pronounced his greatest performance. There is no part in which he goes so much beyond the expectation of his auditor; and that he has not

made so forcible an impression in this as in some other parts, is perhaps as much owing to the play as to the actor. It is not, in many respects, adapted to please the general taste. Hamlet is, indeed, abundantly verbose and philosophical; but he is not bold, resolute and intrepid, which seem to be considered by prescription as the leading qualifications in the hero of a tragedy. There is a greater profusion of speeches, and a greater paucity of incidents, than in almost any other of the plays of Shakespear.

To exhibit the character of Hamlet with full effect, requires indeed not merely a capital actor, but a consummate critic. Mr Kemble, by uniting in himself this rare conjunction of talents, may therefore be considered as its only adequate representative now on the stage. His performance is not only a correct deline-

ation of the character, but a perpetual and luminous commentary on the text of Shakespear.

Before entering into a detailed criticism of the performance, it will be necessary to premise a few additional remarks on the nature of the character.

There is not to be found in any play, nor scarcely to be imagined in real existence, a character more interesting to the heart, than that of Hamlet. He is not so much calculated to excite envy or to attract admiration, as to secure respect and affection. He has few of the dazzling qualities of a hero, but he has the noblest feelings of a man, and the genuine piety of a christian. His sense of honour and integrity is acute; his hatred of moral depravity is vehement. His humanity, politeness, candour and generosity, are on most

occasions conspicuous ; his good sense and accomplishments are extraordinary. Yet these qualities render his life miserable, and his death infamous. His great misfortune is that his virtues are all engrafted on his feelings, and do not appear to be the result of a system of fixed principles. They are therefore precarious and eventual ; not calculated to stand the test of trying occasions and unforeseen exigencies. But his very failings, as they arise from this unhappy source, contribute to render him more interesting. His weaknesses, and even his crimes, do not render him unamiable, and we are more inclined to mourn the fault than to detest the offender. He possesses a degree of sensibility uncommonly acute, and almost morbid, which being strongly excited, it rises, as is usual in such cases, into paroxysms of occasional violence, and

then relapses into habitual melancholy. With these dispositions, so unfit for conflicting with difficulty and danger, he is unhappily placed in a situation the most arduous that can be conceived. He then becomes bewildered, and acts with the natural inconsistency of a person governed by his feelings. A man so constituted, is always safe, as long as his path is straight before him ; but entangle him in perplexity, and he is no longer to be depended on. He loses his self-possession, and his actions cease to be under his own controul. So it is with Hamlet. Roused to purposes of revenge by every motive of natural affection, and even by supernatural agency, he digests the most sanguinary schemes of vengeance, but his native timidity and his conscientious scruples restrain him. Yet soon after he entertains sentiments and commits actions which seem to set all conscience at de-



fiance. Sometimes, he is daring even to desperation, at others, he is cautious and hesitating beyond all bounds of prudence. He is the very soul of honour, and yet he submits to artifices which seem inconsistent with the ingenuoufness and simplicity of his nature. When he perceives the difficulties of his situation are too hard for him, he entertains thoughts of self-murder. All these are the natural workings of diseased sensibility, in a mind of virtuous dispositions but weak temperament. The consequences are such as might be apprehended. Every step he takes exposes him to hazard without advancing his purpose, for it is suggested by the feeling and the occasion of the moment. While he is deliberating, the opportunity of acting presents itself; when his moment of decision arrives, the occasion is lost; and amidst this vibration of purpose, his own destruction is planned.

and effected. The man of success is he who subdues his feelings to his views, and reserves his energy for the instant when he can strike with effect. All his movements are parts of a digested plan, from which he is not to be diverted by any casual emotion or unforeseen incident. This equanimity of mind Hamlet did not possess; and his death is therefore perfectly consonant to the natural course of events.

From these considerations, I presume, it will appear that we ought not to defer, without hesitation, to the judgment of some modern critics, who exclaim loudly against the inconsistencies in the conduct of Hamlet, and affirm that Shakspeare has drawn an unnatural character. His conduct certainly differs materially from the hero of any other tragedy; and it is because a disposition such as his, is seldom brought into arduous

situations, or made to encounter such complicated difficulties. But Shakspeare, with the usual boldness of original genius, chose to deviate from the beaten track. He thought proper to differ from the usual plan of painting every hero as uniformly courageous, prudent, intrepid and constant, unappalled by danger, and undisturbed by difficulty. He chose a weak and fallible being, such as is most commonly found in human nature; desirous of doing right, but mistaking the way;\* plunged occasionally into vice, from the intemperance of his virtuous feelings, and thrown into the power of the wicked by his inordinate hatred of their crimes.

The prevailing temperament, then, of Hamlet's mind, is extreme sensibility; sometimes rising into gusts of passion;

\* Too fond of the right to pursue the expedient.

sometimes approximating to actual insanity;\* but sinking most commonly into habitual melancholy. It is his natural temper of mind, stimulated by strong causes of grief and indignation, and exacerbated by the extreme perplexity of his situation. It is the duty of the actor to keep constantly in sight, this view of the character; to make these features always predominant, and to reflect how such a disposition is likely to be influenced by the incidents and situations, which occur in the play.

It cannot, I think, be denied, that the young Roscius is admirably qualified by nature, to act such a part as this. His amiable and candid countenance; the air of sensibility and softness in his features; his plaintive and pathetic voice, are all well adapted to the task.

\* *La sensibilité excessive est bien proche à la folie.*

MONTAIGNE.

There is also a solemnity which he is capable of assuming, extremely suited to the pensiveness of Hamlet. It is now time to examine, more minutely, his execution of the part.

In the first scene at the palace, he delivers Hamlet's sarcasm on receiving the King's salutation,

"A little more than kin, and less than kind,"

with a change of the usual emphasis. He lays the accent on "more" and "less" instead of "kin and kind," as is generally done. The exact meaning of the expression, is probably not understood in the present times, but I should not suppose the alteration is for the better. The reply to his mother, beginning "seems, madam?" was well spoken in the main, but some of the lines were recited too rapidly. The next speech

“ Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt, &c.” was also given with great force and beauty on the whole, though not without some faults. The exclamation in the fourth line, “ Oh God, oh God,” was in a manner by far too violent and impatient. The sense of the lines both before and immediately after it, shew clearly that Hamlet is expressing a strain of sorrow and lamentation, but not of fretfulness or agony. The two following lines, “ How weary, stale, &c.” were spoken exactly as they ought to be, in a tone of deep and solemn pathos. When he comes to the broken line, “ Let me not think—frailty thy name is woman ;” the transition of Hamlet, when striving to divert his mind from the contemplation of his own griefs, by a general reflection, was most happily and expressively marked.

Next follows the admirable scene

between Hamlet, the officers on guard, and Horatio, which is not one of the most successful parts of the performance. The deep melancholy of Hamlet, apparent from the preceding soliloquy, is too suddenly and too visibly cast aside on the meeting with his friends. When he comes to the awful apostrophe, "My father—methinks I see my father!" he assumes a most striking attitude of fixed and solemn abstraction, which, however, he quits on Horatio asking, "Oh where, my Lord?" and resuming his usual manner says, "In my mind's eye, Horatio," in a tone of disappointment and sadness, as though he regretted that it was *only* in his mind's eye. This reading is certainly not warranted by the sense of the text. Hamlet's reverie continues till the lines where he gives the striking and summary character of his father in

reply to Horatio. "He was a man, &c." which were most impressively delivered. After the narrative of the apparition, to which he has listened with deep attention, he quits Horatio for a moment, goes to Marcellus and asks, but where was this? After receiving an answer, he suddenly returns to Horatio, and asks, "Did *you* not speak to it?" laying the emphasis on "*you*," as though he meant to ask him, somewhat reproachfully, why he in particular, did not speak to it. This is a refinement of discrimination altogether unnecessary and unauthorized. The remainder of the scene was faultless.

His scene with the ghost is a piece of acting sublime and pathetic beyond all description. From the striking attitude into which he throws himself on discovering the ghost, he sinks slowly down to a kneeling posture, and in a



voice of piety and reverence, supplicates to know his pleasure. His attitude when following the ghost, is highly picturesque and impressive. When they return to the front scene he asks, "Whither wilt thou lead me? &c." with almost breathless agitation, and when the ghost says "Mark me," he answers "I will," with a faint voice and languid manner, as if quite exhausted with extreme perturbation. All this is admirably suited to the sensibility of Hamlet, and to the solemnity of the occasion.

In the subsequent dialogue with his friends, the impression of the awful scene he had just passed through, is not to be traced so distinctly in his behaviour, as it ought to be. The dialogue with Polonius, in which he begins to practice his counterfeited madness, and the following one with Rosencrantz and Guil-

derstern, afford room for no particular remark. They have been thought to discover somewhat too much of vivacity, but considering the appearance which Hamlet is then endeavouring to assume, I think the censure is groundless. The inimitable apostrophe "What a piece of work is man, &c." was spoken with a dignified and rapturous enthusiasm worthy of the composition, and it is not possible to say more. His delivery of the next soliloquy, "Why, what a rogue and peasant slave am I," is entitled to an equal encomium. The various transmutations of thought and fluctuations of passion in that wonderful passage; his contrast between the player's fictitious sorrow and his own actual insensibility; his sudden burst of execration against the King; his instant return to the most bitter self accusation; his cautious and amiable hesitation, on recollecting that the spirit may have deceived him, and

his final resolution, not to act without better grounds ; were all distinguished and expressed exactly in the true spirit of the author, and with all the animation of reality.

The judicious delivery of the next soliloquy, "To be or not to be, that is the question," has often been thought to furnish a fair test of oratorical ability. There appears no reason for considering it in that light, except that on ordinary occasions, it is seldom spoken with propriety. It requires merely an effort of the understanding, and nothing of that power of expressing the passions and affections which constitutes the highest and most difficult attainment of the art. The passage contains a series of profound moral reflections, conceived without much emotion, at a time when the mind was not violently agitated,

though it bears the characteristic hue of Hamlet's prevailing melancholy. It demands however so much good sense in the orator, and such nice discrimination of meaning, that the manner in which it was spoken by the young Roscius, was really astonishing. He delivered it with such accuracy, as to satisfy the maturest judgment, and to bear the most deliberate scrutiny. Some of the lines, particularly,

"To sleep, perchance to dream—aye there's the rub."

"That undiscovered country, from whose bourne, &c."

he delivered with peculiar beauty and effect. His only error in this soliloquy, is the usual one of delivering it, not as a solitary cogitation, but as an harangue, addressed to the audience.

His deportment in the subsequent scene with Ophelia, has been frequently censured, which is not surprising, when

it is considered how often Shakespear himself has been blamed for writing it. The censure, perhaps, is as ill-founded in this case as the other. It must be remembered that Hamlet, perceiving himself watched, has intentionally incurred a suspicion of madness, and it is his purpose, in this interview, to establish the impression. He certainly overdoes the matter, and practises more rudeness to Ophelia than was necessary for his design; which might as well have been accomplished by some other species of absurdity. But Hamlet was in general remarkable for his politeness and good-breeding; for his delicacy and tenderness. This sudden departure from his usual habits was therefore particularly adapted to strike attention and confirm suspicion. At all events, it was certainly played by our hero in the spirit in which it appears to have been written. There was nothing to be

wished for, except, perhaps, a little more gravity of deportment, considering that the madness of Hamlet is melancholy and gloomy. His acting, at the time of performing the play before the King and Queen, admits of the same defence. When the catastrophe approaches, and the King suddenly retires in violent trepidation, he is thought by some to express his exultation with too much levity, and an air too triumphant, considering the dreadful discovery he had just ascertained. Here again the author shares the same censure and the same defence. It must be remembered that the deliverance from suspense is, for the moment, a pleasing sensation; and that when we are ardently bent on the pursuit of any purpose, we are pleased at its accomplishment, even though the object we have attained, is itself a cause of regret.\*

\* See Richardson's Analysis.

This is especially the case in the passion of revenge. Hamlet is now assured that he may pursue his schemes of vengeance with a safe conscience, and the discovery is for the moment a matter of high gratification.

Hamlet's celebrated advice to the players, being a passage purely didactic, requires a mode of delivery something similar to the preceding soliloquy in the same act, and it was spoken, if possible, with improved grace and propriety.

His interesting interview with his mother in the closet, though not faultless, has many excellencies. He is in a high degree animated and affecting, but his manner is somewhat too abrupt and violent, and he again loses sight occasionally of the habitual solemnity of his character. His farewell exhortations to the Queen, however, have all

the tendernefs and weight of which the words are fufceptible. The fcene with Horatio at Ophelia's grave, is entitled to the fame commendation. His reflections on taking up the fkull of Yorick, were as energetic and natural, as if the occafion had been real.

In every part of the laft fcene, his acting was admirable. The amiable and conciliatory addrefs of Hamlet to Laertes, beginning, "Give me your pardon, Sir, &c." accords fo well with his open countenance, and graceful action, that no representative of the character ever gave it with more juft effect. His fencing fcene with Laertes, I fhall not attempt to describe.\* It is the object of undivided admiration with every audience, and is fuch an exhibition of grace and beauty, as can feldom

\* He was taught the art of fencing by his father, who is admitted to be one of the firft fencers in England.



be witnessed on the boards of any theatre. In the dying address to Horatio, he could not be exceeded even in imagination ; his pathetic request that his friend would still consent to

“ Draw his breath in pain, in this harsh world,”

and his anxiety, even in the agonies of death, to leave behind him a fair reputation, were so affecting that no spectator could behold them without the deepest sympathy.

On a general review of this performance, it must appear to a candid observer, that though it cannot be pronounced a perfect delineation of the character, it is yet a wonderful effort of dramatic ability. He exhibits, with few exceptions, every beauty which depends on natural and animated feeling ; on chaste and refined taste ; or

prompt and accurate conception. The errors arise mostly from the infirmities of his age. The vivacity of youth, interrupts at intervals, his settled views of the character, and disturbs the steadiness of his assumed habits. The personification of Hamlet, is to him a perpetual restraint ; a constant suppression of sensations which are ever ready to predominate. To preserve through all the diversified scenes of the part, the dignified gloom inspired by princely virtue and wounded sensibility, is perhaps possible, but it requires a perfection of self-command which can only be acquired by years and experience.

The erroneous readings which occur in the course of his performance, are, in all probability, to be ascribed to the influence of ill example, or of improper instructions. Some of them, it is plain, can be attributed to no other source.

*Osman in Zara.*

THIS character has not unfrequently been deemed the best of all our hero's performances, but to me it appears unaccountable that such an opinion could ever have been formed. It contains indeed, some passages and some scenes, which exhibit his strength to great advantage, but on the other hand there is not a part, in all that he performs, so calculated to detect his weaknesses. This, I presume, must clearly appear, on considering the nature of the character, and the structure of the play.

The tragedy of Zara, which, as every one knows, is a close translation from the *Zaire* of Voltaire, possesses in an eminent degree, all the characteristics of the French tragedy. The three

unities of Aristotle, those of time, place and action, are rigidly observed. The story is simple ; the characters are few, and no events are admitted, but such as depend on the main action, and contribute to advance the catastrophe. From this simplicity of plot, and paucity of incidents, result a necessity of filling up the play with sentimental declamation and long speeches. These are in a very high degree, elegant and refined, but they do not suit the taste of an English audience, which delights more in the tumult of action than the display of eloquence ; and on that account, few translations from the French theatre have maintained their footing on the British stage.

With speeches of this description, the part of Osman particularly abounds, and therefore it appears to me ill adapted to display the talents of the young

Roscian in their proper point of view. They contain, in general, not much variety of sense or fluctuation of passion; very little to rouse the attention of the audience, or keep alive the energy of the actor. Great subtilty of thought, and very nice sollicitude in delivering them, are therefore required in order to keep out of that level and uniform recitation, to which young actors are so frequently liable. It is on such occasions as these, that our hero's principal defect, almost the only one indeed which is of much importance, is brought forward into conspicuous notice. The imperfections of his voice become very apparent in these unanimated harangues: if they happen to be very long, he is in danger of degenerating into a monotonous recitation, which throws an air of languor into the finest composition. Yet notwithstanding the circumstances

which are against him, in this play, his occasional excellencies are such, as even to induce an opinion that the part of Osman is his greatest character.

The opening of the tragedy is extremely languid. There is, perhaps, no part of any of his performances in which he appears to less advantage than in the first act of Zara. The two principal characters are in a state of tranquil happiness. Their prospects are favourable; their affection is mutual; nothing seems likely to occur which can interrupt their felicity. Except at the close of the act, the speeches consist wholly of tedious explanations and elaborate expressions of tenderness. In all this there is very little to rouse the spirit of the actor, though a great deal to employ his talents. It is not, however, for the reasons just given, the department in which the young Roscius is

calculated to shine. Another circumstance also operates greatly against him.

There are many instances in which, notwithstanding his diminutive stature, he is capable of personating the most august and dignified characters, without any deduction from the illusion of the scene. But in these cases the feelings require to be powerfully interested. In situations of unmixed dignity, where no strong emotion intervenes to catch the sympathy of the spectators, the insignificance of his size will obtrude itself on the eye. This happens in the scene with Nerestan, at the close of the act. The majesty of the eastern Monarch, appears on that occasion, somewhat diminished in the hands of his representative.

In the second act he does not appear.

At the opening of the third, he is still unagitated, and his powers are of course not yet brought into action. At length, in the interview with Zara, his passions are set in motion, and his excellencies begin to open. In his behaviour to his mistress, before any cause of vexation appears, his address is tender, delicate and courtly. When, at last, his serenity is disturbed by her persevering coldness, his emotion gradually rises, in proportion to his causes of suspicion and his uncertain conjectures. But still his passions are kept subdued, for the extent of his misfortunes is not yet ascertained.

The magnanimity of Osman, in the fourth act, when he relieves Zara from every obligation, was, in spite of disadvantages, exhibited with wonderful address. His deportment and expression were princely and magnificent in all



respects. In speaking the words, "you are free," his tone and gesture were inimitably striking. At length he receives the fatal letter which decides his fate. His convulsive agitation on that occasion, and the subsequent conflicts of rage and jealousy which tear his frame, were exhibited in their natural and appropriate violence. When the favourable answer of Zara, and the appointed assignation, are reported to him, he rises into all the wildness of ungovernable fury; the torrent of passion reaches its height, and he stabs his mistress in the heat of his frenzy. The crisis of his rage is then past, and he sinks into the gloomy sadness of despair. Every thing, in this overwhelming progress of passion, was depicted with an energy, which carried every auditor irresistibly along with him, and yet was so chastened, as never, for a moment, to interrupt the current

of feeling. The last speech was in a strain of sublime pathos, which the most obdurate heart could not behold unmoved. No power of words can convey an idea of the effect produced by his tones, and looks, and motions, in that most affecting address, in which the poet and the actor seemed to struggle for pre-eminence. When he came to the last words,

“ Tell them I so have loved—and thus revenge her !

he paused in the middle of the line, cast up his eyes, and in a supplicating attitude seemed to ejaculate a short prayer; then repeating the latter part of the line, he struck the fatal blow, in a manner which gave to fiction the most vivid impression of reality.

It may perhaps be worth while to observe, in concluding the account of

this performance, that the action of throwing his cloak across his arm, is practised by far too frequently in the course of the part, though done with all possible grace and elegance. An attitude or motion, very excellent in itself, has its effect destroyed by too frequent repetition.

*Tancred.*

THE interesting character of Tancred, is, on the whole, exceedingly well suited to the powers of the young Roscius, and may with propriety, be classed among his best performances. It is, however, attended with some of the unfavourable circumstances which have been noticed, in the part of Osman, though not in so great a degree. The play of Tancred and Sigismunda, like Zara, contains too much conversation and too little action, but with this difference in its favour, that the scenes are more uniformly animated and impassioned. They are not lengthened out with tedious effusions of sentiment or description; but the strongest passions of human nature, those of love, honour, indignation and disappointment, are always

in action, and always demanding the attention of an enterprising actor. The fate of Tancred himself undergoes, in the course of the play, some surprising and important vicissitudes. The incidents, though few, are striking, and the story, though not very artful or complex, is strongly interesting. The catastrophe is entirely unexpected, and calculated to excite terror and pity, the great ends of tragedy, in a very uncommon degree. On these accounts, the part of Tancred has been judiciously admitted into our hero's list of characters.

The first scene with Siffredi, when he discovers his birth and sudden acquisition of royalty, exhibits him in a point of view most favourable and prepossessing. His youthful and generous ardour in the cause of the unknown Prince, and his modest and graceful,

yet dignified exultation, when the secret is discovered, afforded occasion for a full display of his graceful attitudes and command of countenance. When the first agitation of surprize is over, he turns to the interests of his love. In any sudden change of fortune, we naturally begin to consider how it is likely to influence the passion or pursuit which is uppermost in the heart. So it is with Tancred. He feels all the violence of a first affection, begun in infancy and nourished in solitude, and no acquisition of good is regarded but as it promotes the views of his passion. Nothing could be more finely portrayed than this romantic and youthful ardour. There are two or three declamatory speeches at the end of the act, which were not given with their full effect.

The dialogue between Tancred and Siffredi in the second act, after the dis-

covery of Siffredi's pious fraud, is a fine assumption of manly and dignified deportment, in despite of all the obstacles of childhood. The speech beginning,

" Yes I will be a King, but not a Slave,"

was given with peculiar and pointed effect. The tone of elevation in the first part of the speech, and the transition to softness and gentleness in the conclusion were managed with equal dignity and delicacy.

In the interview with Sigismunda in the fourth act, he displayed all the trembling fondness of an ardent but unhappy lover. When he repeats after her

" Earl Osmond's wife!"

it is in a tone of inexpressible astonish-

ment and horror. His subsequent quarrel with Earl Osmond, and his reply to the reproaches of Siffredi, were highly animated and impressive.

The dying scene affords less occasion for displaying his unequalled force in the pathetic, than in many other of his characters. The preceding dialogue with Sigismunda is drawn out to too great a length at a moment so important, and when the crisis of their fate is at hand. The attention of the audience is suffered to languish, when the interest ought to be advancing to its climax. But after Sigismunda is wounded, he rises into his usual greatness; and his last address to her, has all the expression of violent grief and excessive tenderness which the mournful occasion requires. When extreme anguish and distraction hurry him to madness, he is as affecting, as it is possible to be in



such a situation. Scenes of madness, as they can never be contemplated with any satisfaction, ought to be very rarely introduced on the stage. They may afford scope for the talents of a particular actor, but to the spectator they present nothing but a spectacle of un-mixed horror.

*Achmet in Barbarossa.*

THIS part is also well adapted to the qualifications of the young Roscius, and its selection, as one of his characters, does honour to the taste and judgment of those who recommended it to his study. It is a circumstance somewhat unaccountable, that the tragedy of Barbarossa is now laid aside ; for though it does not contain much fine writing, nor display any high efforts of poetry, yet the story is striking, and the incidents sufficiently calculated for stage effect. The character of Achmet in particular, is exhibited in situations which excite the liveliest interest, and he is brought into difficulties which create the strongest anxiety for his fate.

The first appearance of Achmet, at

the end of the second act, is not under circumstances which tend to prepossess the audience in his favour. He approaches Barbarossa in the disguise of a slave, and with an air of conscious innocence tells a tale of the most deliberate falsehood. This act of treachery is perhaps justified by the previous conduct of the tyrant. Yet the mind is not quite satisfied. It is the part of a hero, to hold on his course in the straight forward path of truth and honour, from which, if possible, the poet should never allow him to deviate on any occasion. The acting of our hero in this scene, affords room for no particular remark. It had all the requisite modesty and plausibility. In the following interview with Othman, in which he assumes his real character, he was remarkably interesting and spirited.

The third act, which affords a performer full opportunity of displaying the extent and the power of his art, was an animated and glowing picture of all that is tender, impassioned and heroic in the youthful mind. The interview with his mother was an admirable scene. No actor that ever appeared can better express the amiable emotions of filial tenderness, and in this case, when struggling with concealment, he was peculiarly affecting. He was equally so in his admonition to the conspirators, to remember mercy in the approaching devastation. But perhaps the most impressive part of the whole performance, was the noble soliloquy at the end of the act, beginning,

“ Now sleep and silence brood o’er the city :”

He delivered this with such a tone of solemn grandeur, and with such atti-

tudes of awe and veneration, that the audience were universally struck with astonishment and delight.

In the fourth act, the spectator's sense of honour and rectitude again revolts at the conduct of Achmet. Knowing himself an impostor, he protests his sincerity with all the boldness of innocence, and bares his breast to the tyrant with an air of truth and candour, which excite no sympathy when known to be hypocritical. The secret motive and the end in view may seem to justify this fraud; but, as I have before observed, a feeling of dissatisfaction prevails at the moment. In discovering himself to the tyrant, our hero assumed an attitude so grand and imposing, that every circumstance of age and size disappeared, and the Prince stood revealed in full majesty.

The interest declines considerably in the fifth act. The death of the tyrant is not accomplished in the way which might have been expected, and the hero of the piece is exhibited in no situation which demands particular attention.

*Rolla in Pizarro.*

THIS character is of a nature totally different from any which has yet been reviewed, and requires a species of talent possessed by very few. Rolla is a being of whom no counterpart is to be found in real life, and his sentiments and language are, for the most part, as extravagant, as his character is unnatural. His heroism is elevated to a pitch above all sympathy, but it raises admiration, and human nature is flattered and entertained by a spectacle of virtue so sublime, and disinterestedness so perfect.

To assume the tone and manner of such a character as this, is a task to which the young Roscius is visibly inadequate. It requires something more than natural feeling and correct taste.

It requires a sort of rigid and stoical dignity, which as I have endeavoured to shew, in speaking of the character of Ofman, is incompatible with his age and figure. He is disqualified likewise on account of a total want of all correspondence in external appearance. Rolla is represented as a veteran soldier; exhausted by hardships and fatigues, and emaciated by a long course of internal suffering. The fancy can admit no resemblance between such a person and a youth in the early bloom of health and beauty.

He delivered most of the sentiments with great delicacy and force, and spoke the celebrated address to the Peruvian soldiers with correctness and effect. He did all that was possible, but the illusion of the character could not for a moment be supported.



*Octavian.*

OCTAVIAN is a character of the same class with Rolla, and, as adapted to the talents of the young Roscius, is of course liable to the same objections. In conduct it is equally unnatural, and in language and manners nearly as extravagant, though in a different way. Yet it is a part in which his success has been greatly superior, for some of the advantages which operate against him in the one are not felt in the other. The language of Octavian is a perpetual burst of strong passion, or of high-wrought enthusiasm, without any of the sententious morality or sedate dignity of Rolla.

The wild harangue of Octavian, when he first darts from the cave, was spoken with more force and effect than

could possibly have been expected, but to the ear of those who had heard it from Kemble, with very diminished effect. The same may be said of the whole of his conversation with Sadi and Agnes in the second act. His passionate dispute with the Goatherd, who touches upon the cause of his sufferings, evinced a very great degree of judgment and spirit, considering the uncommon difficulty he must have felt in managing such untractable and uncouth phraseology. The address to Floranthe's portrait was spoken in a style of exquisite softness and piercing sorrow.

His last scene with Floranthe is accounted one of his greatest masterpieces, and it certainly is so, to such as regard only the extent of his powers without any respect to their proper application. His tones and looks on that occasion are piercing and impassioned

beyond all description, and his attitudes in the highest degree striking and sublime.

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*Romeo.*

THIS Prince of Lovers, the gallant, tender and intrepid Romeo, has not often found an abler representative than the young Roscius. The character, though it contains some admirable features, is not on the whole, one of the happiest of Shakespear's delineations. His latter scenes do not fulfil the expectations which he had previously raised, and what is an important fault, our interest in his fate does not rise in proportion to the increase of his distresses. In such a case the representative, of course, shares the fate of the character.

In the garden of the Capulets, when

he addresses Juliet in the balcony, nothing was ever more tender, graceful and attractive than the young Roscius. He seemed, in motion, look and accent, another *Ganymede*, and recalled to memory, the fables of the ancient poets. In the rencounter with Tibalt he was scarcely less admirable. His forbearance, in the beginning of the fray and his generous indignation on the death of Mercutio, were as chaste and spirited as could be wished.

His speech on the starved apothecary was one of his least felicitous efforts in this character. In fact the soliloquy itself, though an admirable composition, is so grossly misplaced, that it is very difficult to give it with proper effect. To utter such an elaborate and descriptive effusion, in a moment of extreme wretchedness, is altogether unnatural. Some of the lines however were extremely well spoken, but there

was occasionally a mistake of emphasis : particularly in the reply to the apothecary,

" I pay thy poverty and not thy will."

The dying scene was, as usual, exquisitely pathetic and impressive.

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### *Douglas.*

DOUGLAS is another character, which has been frequently named as his leading performance ; perhaps because it is the part in which he has generally appeared on the first night of his different engagements. It has no claim to be ranked among his highest efforts, though the character is sufficiently suited to his years and entirely within the reach of his abilities. It is, on the whole, a spirited, chaste and most interesting representation : it displays his powers to

great advantage, but not in all their varieties, nor always to their fullest extent. It affords, however, a very favourable specimen of his general stile of acting, and if it does not class among his greatest, is certainly one of his most unexceptionable performances.

In relating his history to Lord and Lady Randolph, on his first appearance, he does not always strike the audience with that sense of his superiority, which generally becomes manifest before the conclusion of the play. The high spirit of Douglas and the modesty of young Norval, are happily blended, but the tale requires to be told in that kind of level speaking, in which alone his natural defects are perceptible. On this account I cannot think that the character of Douglas is judiciously chosen as an opening part. The long interval between this speech and his re-appearance in the fourth act, allow time for

the audience to digest their opinions, and perhaps their prejudices, before his talents have appeared in their proper lustre.

His manner of speaking the line

"The pursuit I led, we fought and conquered,"

is certainly a happy improvement on the usual method of delivering it. The rest of the speech was delicately and correctly given, excepting only the line,

"Yon trembling coward who forsook his master!"

which, after making the proper allowance for the ardent heroism, always uppermost in his soul, and ever ready to burst forth, was in a manner by far too impassioned. It does not become the magnanimity of Douglas, to express such resentment, at a circumstance so common as the cowardice of a peasant; and especially in a case which

concerned his own personal safety. In general, however, the leading traits of the character are preserved throughout with exact consistency.

The scene with Lady Randolph, in which he discovers the great secret of his birth, is scarcely surpassed by any thing in his whole range of characters. In the pathos of filial tenderness, as I have before observed, he is entirely unrivalled, and there is nothing of that kind in the English drama, more adapted than this scene, to call forth his powers to their utmost limits. His extreme youth, in this instance, added to the interest, without diminishing the illusion. The scene in which he quarrels with Glenalvon, has become generally celebrated, as one of the finest exhibitions of martial fire and dignified heroism, ever witnessed on any stage. The emotions of indignation, anger and contempt, as they alternately prevail or



intermix with each other, were accurately distinguished and most forcibly expressed.

In relating the circumstances respecting his tutor in the art of war, he has been thought to display more animation than ought to be assumed by a mere narrator of events in the third person. This charge is not quite groundless, but it ought to be recollected, in extenuation, that he is speaking on a subject which is the nearest to his heart, and which is supposed, always to transport him a little beyond the bounds of common propriety. In the dying scene of Douglas, he is perhaps greater than in any other play, on the same occasion. The author has done every thing for him that he could wish, and has placed him in a situation, than which the imagination cannot conceive any thing more deeply affecting. He dies under every circumstance, which can

inspire the warmest attachment to his character and the tenderest compassion for his fate. In this instance the intentions of the author were more than executed. He exhibits the convulsions of death in a manner which excites terror and pity in the strongest degree. Yet every movement is graceful and free from any distortion of face or person, which can cause the least sensation approaching to disgust or horror. A matter of very rare and difficult attainment. When at the point of expiring, he makes a convulsive spring to embrace his mother; but his strength fails him; he sinks at her feet and dies in the effort. No piece of stage effect was ever more happily conceived or more admirably executed.\*

\* The expression of Cicero on a similar subject, though on a very different occasion, may be happily applied in this instance, with a little perversion of meaning.

Quis nostrum tam animo aegresti ac duro fuit, ut ROSCII morte nuper non commoveretur? *Cic. pro Arch.*

*Richard the 3d.*

It seems to be the general opinion, that he has been less successful in this most arduous character, than in any other which he has hitherto attempted. Indeed, it could not, in the nature of things, be otherwise. No flexibility of features, no conceivable versatility of talent, could transform the beautiful and innocent countenance of the young Roscius, into any resemblance of the dark, designing, malevolent, and hypocritical Richard. It was equally impossible, for the soft and plaintive voice of the young actor, to counterfeit the ferocious growl of the tyrant, when he is plotting assassination, and descanting on his own deformities: with these allowances, he certainly did every thing which could have been expected by his warmest admirers. But no power of art can support the illusion of the scene,

in Richard, if the actor is not gifted with some natural requisites for the part.

In the first soliloquy, "Now are our brows, &c." and in the scene where he kills the King, his deficiency in external requisites was particularly obvious. He was also, on these occasions, somewhat defective in his conception of the views and sentiments of the character. In the celebrated dialogue with Lady Anne, it was wonderful, with what gentle suavity and affected meekness he paid his court to the affronted widow. If it wanted the solemn hypocrisy of Kemble, and the sardonic grin of Cooke, his address was much more seductive than either, and on that account served to give some air of probability to a scene, which, almost beyond any other, is outrageous to all the feelings of nature. In his coronation scene he was eminently successful, and not less so, when he was giving his orders before the engage-

ment. The confusion, uproar and heat of battle were strikingly apparent, in his hurried motions and agitated looks. In the descriptive, farcastic and malevolent parts of the character, where the soul of Richard is so admirably laid open, he was of course unequal to his author.

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*Frederick in Lover's Vows.*

THIS part affords very little room for criticism. It is universally allowed to be his most perfect, if not his most arduous character, and the performance is so nearly faultless, that it affords occasion for scarcely any remarks, but such as are in a strain of uniform panegyric. It is in all respects adapted to his faculties and talents, and there is scarcely an interval in which his deficiencies can be perceived. He performs it with the most natural ease, and with